

Hon. Tim Bishop  
Five Minute Statement  
July 17, 2007

### Eleventh Anniversary of the TWA Flight 800 Disaster

Mr. Speaker, I rise on the solemn occasion of the 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the crash of TWA Flight 800. Many Americans remember where they were when they heard the shocking and tragic news about Flight 800 when it crashed off the southern shore of Long Island 11 years ago today – on the evening of July 17, 1996 – claiming the lives of all 230 passengers and crew on board.

The event remains one of the worst air disasters in history and led to one of the most costly and extended investigations to date. Today, that loss is still felt by hundreds of families whose loved ones perished but are remembered by the breath-taking monument to their lives that extends along the grounds of East Moriches, Long Island – overlooking the waters of the Atlantic Ocean where the plane fell.

Tomorrow, we honor the memory of those who perished – just moments after taking off from JFK International Airport bound for Paris. The victims were on the way for home; many were high school students on the first leg of an international field trip; and some were on the way to visit loved ones.

Just as the families who lost their loved ones to the crash deserve to be remembered, so do each of Long Island's emergency personnel, volunteers, and neighbors who selflessly responded to the crash and worked tirelessly over the next several days following the disaster to assist with the search and recovery efforts.

Like other challenging times our Nation has faced, the reaction to the Flight 800 catastrophe brought out the best, not only among my constituents, but in so many others in the surrounding towns, counties, and states across the northeast who joined in helping my community recover from its most horrific tragedy.

Throughout their grief and despite the unimaginable shock, the families of the victims worked tirelessly to build a permanent memorial with the help of Navy Seabees and thousands of dedicated local and building trade union members. The solemn monument serves as a constant reminder of our tremendous loss eleven years ago tomorrow.

Last year, it was my honor and privilege to attend the dedication of the memorial completed at Smith Point County Park just before the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the crash.

The centerpiece of this breath-taking and poignant memorial is a black granite sculpture called "The Light." It was designed by Henry Seaman, whose cousin died in the crash. The monument offers some measure of closure to everyone who was affected by this terrible tragedy.

The memory of the passengers of Flight 800 lives on because of the continued work of people like Henry's brother, John Seaman, who is President of the Families of Flight 800 Association and among the memorial's most passionate and hard-working advocates.

In the 11 years since Flight 800, hundreds of thousands of people have visited the park in an acknowledgment of a shared sorrow for those who died. The monument ensures that future generations can do the same.

As we recognize the 11th anniversary of the Flight 800 disaster, it is important for us to take stock in the progress achieved since 1996 to prevent air disasters. We have made some great strides in aviation safety, particularly with design upgrades for passenger and cargo aircraft planes.

In particular, ongoing research and development of "inerting" technology will help to mitigate the vulnerability of aircraft fuel tanks to flammability, the underlying cause of the Flight 800 crash.

In fact, the crash was likely caused by a spark from a short-circuit in the Boeing 747's wiring that ignited the tank's volatile vapors. Although this was determined years ago, and we know how to prevent similar disasters, we still have not required technology upgrades to protect passengers against another tragedy like the one witnessed 10 years ago.

To date, however, the Federal Aviation Administration has delayed taking on this challenge, and has declined to work the industry to implement a final FAA directive that would protect every air traveler with existing technology.

We still don't have the mandate for change. That is why I introduced the "*Transport Aircraft Fuel Tank Safety Act*," which requires the FAA to retrofit all planes with new technology and to increase safety. I am pleased to report that the pending FAA reauthorization bill, which was recently passed by the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee, of which I am a member, includes a similar provision.

Senator Schumer is sponsoring a companion measure and is working with his colleagues on the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee to move this legislation.

I am hopeful that my colleagues here in the Congress will work with me to bring an end to this delay. We have taken significant steps towards maintaining the memory of Flight 800, but we should also ensure that we don't allow this disaster to repeat itself.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to once again offer my deepest condolences to the surviving families and friends of the victims of Flight 800, and encourage my colleagues

to join me in commending each of them for the grace and dignity with which they have handled unspeakable pain.